

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus for a vehicle including an outer column through which an inner column is slidably inserted, a lock housing portion formed on the outer column, and a locking mechanism that includes a pair of movable pieces slidably fitted within a bore formed through the lock housing portion in a vehicle body widthwise direction, a screw rod passing through said pair of movable pieces, and an operation lever disposed at an end portion of the screw rod,

wherein said pair of movable pieces is shifted toward each other so as to press said inner column and away from each other so as to release the pressure on said inner column, in response to swinging of said operating lever,

wherein a cross section of the bore of the lock housing portion is non-circular and cross sections of said pair of movable pieces are also non-circular correspondingly, and

wherein ~~an axial length of~~ a respective surface portion of each of said pair of movable pieces in contact with said inner column ~~is~~ has a length, in an axial direction of said steering column, that is at least substantially greater than or equal to a cross dimension of said bore in an axial plane containing an axis of said screw rod and parallel to an axis of said steering column.

2. (Previously Presented) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said lock housing is integrally molded with said outer column.

3. (Previously Presented) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said outer column is formed of die cast molded aluminum.

4. (Currently Amended) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus for a vehicle including an outer column through which an inner column is slidably inserted, a lock housing portion formed on the outer column, and a locking mechanism that includes a pair of movable pieces slidably fitted within a bore formed through the lock

housing portion in a vehicle body widthwise direction, a screw rod passing through said pair of movable pieces, and an operation lever disposed at an end portion of the screw rod,

wherein said pair of movable pieces is shifted toward each other so as to press said inner column and away from each other so as to release the pressure on said inner column, in response to swinging of said operating lever,

wherein a cross section of the bore of the lock housing is polygonal and cross sections of said pair of movable pieces are also polygonal correspondingly,

wherein respective peripheral surfaces forming the polygonal cross section of each of said bore and said movable pieces include at least a surface which is parallel to an axis of the screw rod, and

wherein ~~an axial length of~~ a respective surface portion of each of said pair of movable pieces in contact with said inner column ~~is~~ has a length, in an axial direction of said steering column, that is at least substantially greater than or equal to a cross dimension of said bore in an axial plane containing an axis of said screw rod and parallel to an axis of said steering column.

5. (Previously Presented) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the respective peripheral surfaces forming the polygonal cross section of each of said bore and said movable pieces, are all flat and parallel to an axis of the screw rod.

6. (Previously Presented) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus according to claim 1, wherein each of said surface portions is of greater axial length than said cross dimension of said bore.

7. (Previously Presented) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the cross sections of said bore and said pair of movable pieces are generally triangular.

8. (Previously Presented) An extendable and contractable steering column apparatus according to claim 4, wherein each of said surface portions is of greater axial length than said cross dimension of said bore.